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FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2629
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000007

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF A/S FRAZER, S/E WILLIAMSON, AND AF/SPG
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: MORE ON POSSIBLE REPLACEMENTS FOR PRESIDENT
BASHIR, THOUGH SERIOUS DOUBTS REMAIN THAT A LEADERSHIP
CHANGE IS LIKELY

REF: A. 08 KHARTOUM 1817

[1](#)B. 08 KHARTOUM 1777

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Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d)
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[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The SPLM continues to believe that a succession scenario is likely, and it contends that the NCP regime is actively considering several candidates to replace President Bashir. However, many observers in Khartoum doubt that President Bashir will ever agree to step down as a result of pressure over the ICC indictment, and that he is likely aware of the many succession rumors currently circulating widely in Khartoum and Juba. An NCP contact reported that the party has "thought about options for the future" but does not foresee any change in leadership due to the ICC. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) SPLA Chief of Staff Oyai Deng Ajak told CG Juba January 2 that FVP Kiir had a lengthy phone conversation with Sudanese President Omar el Bashir on January 1. Ajak, his deputies, and the new SPLA Affairs Minister Nhial Deng Nhial dined with Kiir that same evening so that Kiir could discuss the contents of the call with them. Per Ajak, Kiir believes Bashir to be "at his most demoralized point" and in a heightened state of concern about Second Vice President Ali Osman Taha and Presidential Advisor Nafie Ali Nafie, who Kiir believes have closed ranks against the soon-to-be indicted leader. Ajak also stated that the GOSS/SPLM leadership now believes that ISS Director Salah Ghosh has aligned himself with Nafie and Taha. "Taha is very confused right now," Ajak said, "he knows that he has the right personalities behind him, but that he still lacks military support. If he were to make a move, it would land the NCP in bloodshed - but unlike Nafie he is not satisfied in being a king-maker."

[1](#)3. (C) Bashir also reportedly utilized the call to stress his unhappiness about Kiir's forthcoming visit to the United States, noting in particular that the timing of the visit frustrated Bashir's attempts to control (and perhaps prevent) his exit from the Presidency. According to Ajak, Kiir believes that former SAF General and current Governor of Gezira State Abdel Rahman Al Khatim is Bashir's choice to replace him - but the idea of a "palace coup" does not sit well with the Sudanese Armed Forces - nor with President Bashir himself. Others in the SPLM believe that Bashir's "inner circle" of GNU Finance Minister Awad el Jaz and Defense Minister Abdel Rahim Mohamed Hussein are backing two possible candidates - former SAF General and Minister of Defense) and current Minister of the Presidency Bakri Saleh,

or former SAF General (and former Interior Minister and UN PermRep) and current Managing Director of Zain Telecom Fateh Irwa, as possible replacements for President Bashir. Ajak speculated that Bashir, despite the existence of two palatable candidates in Khartoum, is still "not mentally ready to accept the end has already been decided." However, he offered that Bashir's calculations about potential successors are complicated by the fact that these two inactive SAF military commanders (Saleh and Irwa) have allegedly signaled their willingness to accept the national presidency. Ajak cited the current SAF D/COS General Adad Auf, a hardliner, as an alternative candidate presently under consideration by some NCP factions. Ajak remains convinced that the NCP will only accept Bashir's ouster if it comes from the ranks of active SAF military commanders.

14. (C) Observers in Khartoum are considerably less sanguine that the NCP has any plans to replace Bashir. Wealthy Dubai-based Sudanese plutocrat Mamoun Mekki, who has multiple business ties to the regime, told CDA Fernandez on January 3 that Bashir is wise to all these plots and especially to the coming together of Taha, Nafie and money man Awad al-Jaz conspiring to replace him. Mekki suggested that Bashir is better than any of his suggested replacements, more likely to compromise with the West than the others, and will be able to block their plots. He quoted a Sudanese proverb saying "they intend to trap the lion, but he turns and devours them first." He doubted that Bakri Saleh, a Bashir yesman and reputed hashish devotee, could be a serious candidate. He suggested that the time is ripe for "Bashir to be Bashir," turn the tables on his treacherous advisors and rule through the army.

15. (C) Opposition politician Mubarak al Fadil Al Mahdi (Umma Reform and Renewal) told polchief December 29 that "four

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individuals must agree on anything that happens in Sudan -- Bashir, Taha, Nafie, and Al Jaz - and Bashir will not agree to go under pressure from the ICC." Al Fadil observed that in the Sudanese context, it would be viewed as "shameful" if the President resigned under these circumstances. Al Fadil, who is close to many in the SPLM and facilitates business contracts in Juba, believes that the SPLM is somewhat overly optimistic in its belief that a leadership change is imminent. Given the prospect that Bashir might seek asylum in Saudi Arabia, Al Fadil said there is a joke currently circulating Khartoum comparing Bashir to another Ja'alyn leader who fought for his country and tribe but then fled into exile. Al Fadil recounted the story of Ja'alyn King 'Mek' Namir, who contested Ottoman rule in Sudan in the late 1800s by attacking the administrators sent to collect taxes (according to legend, inviting them to dinner but then attempting to trap them in a fire) but was forced to flee to Ethiopia when pursued by the Pasha's henchmen. (Note: There is currently a chain of Mek Namir pharmacies in Khartoum. End note.)

16. (C) NCP contacts have been understandably circumspect with regard to discussion of succession. NCP negotiator (and former NISS chief and retired general) Yahia Babiker Hussein told polchief December 30 that the NCP will be methodical in its reaction to the ICC. Babiker previously told us that the NCP "will not commit suicide" in response to the ICC but rather would continue to work toward implementing the CPA and planning for elections. Babiker, who accompanied Vice President Taha to Juba last week, said there was no basis for the many rumors circulating in Khartoum and Juba regarding succession scenarios. He acknowledged that "of course the party has thought about options for the future," but said he does not foresee any change in leadership due to the ICC. With regard to the SPLM's concern that Bashir will declare a state of emergency in response to an ICC indictment and suspend the Interim Constitution, the MFA formally denied in press remarks January 3 that the GNU had any plans to declare a state of emergency in the event of an ICC indictment.

17. (C) Comment: The rumors and speculation over a possible "palace coup" are likely to continue long after the ICC indictment is announced. While we don't anticipate an immediate shift in power, there certainly is sharpened turmoil within the ruling elite and it is possible that the ICC announcement will change the NCP's calculations with regard to elections and could affect the way the ruling party approaches Darfur and CPA implementation. Although many fear that the indictment will make the regime less flexible, there is also a school of thought that the indictment will force the regime to make additional concessions and prove its leadership capacity in order to stay in power - and therefore more likely to take positive steps in Darfur and on the CPA, to spite the ICC. This would not preclude the regime taking selective, punitive, but largely symbolic action against foreign missionq and hocal actAvistQ sead as abetting the work of the ICC. CDA will meet with additional NCP insiders over the next week to probe for likely NCP regime actions in response to the ICC indictment of President Bashir. End comment.
FERNANDEZ